

BACKYARD WILDERNESS

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Written by

Andrew Young, Susan Todd & Wendy MacKeigan

Additional Writing by Mose Richards

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48 Pond Meadow Road  
Croton on Hudson, NY 10520  
(914) 271-2171

While the theater is still dark, we hear a loud, jeering BIRD CALL. A time-lapse sun arcs up the immense screen. We're gazing across a frozen, snow-covered pond. Ice-covered reeds shimmer in the first rays of sunlight.

MAIN TITLE: BACKYARD WILDERNESS

As the title fades, the VOICE of a young woman (early 20s) arises, our OLDER KATIE.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Many people can remember when their life changed in a big way - when they first realized what matters to them.

The morning sunlight shines on KATIE, sitting by a window in her home by the pond. She is a precocious and witty 11 year old girl who serves as the film's main human character. She looks down, slowly twisting in her chair with boredom.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

For me, it happened when I was eleven - in my own backyard.

We hear another bird call and the camera finds a blue jay on a high limb. The jay launches skyward and we follow.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Let me take you there...

We soar with the jay, banking and gliding over the barren limbs and white ground of a northern forest in winter. We peer down from the jay's POV.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

The suburban woods where I grew up, outside New York City, had once been farmland. Gradually, the trees had grown back ... and with them, wildlife had returned.

We sail down toward a small subdivision and glide above its central street.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

But one animal dominates life in this new forest - us!

We sail with the jay through the subdivision.

{REVISION} 2.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
Millions of us are actually *forest dwellers* - our towns and cities built in the middle of living woodland ecosystems.

We arrive at Katie's house.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
But most of us don't really notice. At least, I didn't when I was a kid, even though I lived by a pond, at the end of the road.

We land on a low branch. The blue jay peers into the window of a house.

2

EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - MORNING

2

Through different windows, we can make out a family and the glow of electronic screens, and we can hear video-game sounds. At the family computer sits 11 year-old Katie.

KATIE  
Has anyone seen my tablet?

MOTHER  
Did you look in the TV room, Katie?

FATHER  
Anyone wanna go for a walk?

KATIE  
Too busy!

BEN  
(as his game character dies)  
Agh... Later Dad -- only one more level to go!

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
I wasn't that interested in what was happening outside my house. But things **were** happening...

The blue jay stares at the humans with a puzzled look. A lone coyote howls in the distance.

FATHER  
(barely audible)  
Who keeps taking the remote?

{REVISION} 3.

3 EXT. KATIE'S BACKYARD - MORNING 3

A coyote emerges from its snow-covered den.

Deer prance through a winter forest. One of the does SCRAPES at the snowy earth to uncover grass. Her hoof breaks through a hidden snow tunnel.

An exposed field mouse darts away through the tunnel. It emerges by the dryer vent of Katie's house.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

It turns out that nature was a lot closer than I thought.

The mouse enters the dryer vent of the house.

4 INT/EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - MORNING 4

The camera follows the mouse inside the home. Under cover of commercials on TV before a football game, the mouse scurries past the father's stocking feet and a sleeping dog. On the TV in the background, a commercial depicts a runner on a treadmill.

TV VOICE

*Feel like you're always running but never getting anywhere?*

The commercial racks focus to a hamster running on a wheel. The mouse pauses to watch the hamster.

TV VOICE (CONT'D)

*Get out of the rat race and try STRESS LESS, the natural supplement that helps you stop and smell the roses...*

BEN (O.S.)

(calling from other room)  
Game on yet?!

FATHER

Homework first, Ben.

BEN (O.S.)

Did it an hour ago.

KATIE (O.S.)

Can you do my science report, too?

The mouse emerges beneath the toe kick of a kitchen cabinet. In the background, Katie's mother is making lunch.

{REVISION} 4.

MOTHER (O.S.)

What report?

The mouse darts under the toe kick of the kitchen cabinets and the camera follows it. Katie marches though the kitchen past the mouse, unknowingly.

KATIE

You know, connections in nature.  
Eco ... whatever.

BEN (O.S.)

They're called "ecosystems".

KATIE

Yeah ... I need my tablet for some  
research.

A crumb drops and the mouse stops to nibble, fleeing once the mother's giant sneaker steps beside him. In the background, Katie searches the kitchen counters.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

I was a lucky kid.

The mouse scurries down the hallway. Suddenly there's a loud WHIRRING sound. From the mouse's POV, Katie careens down the hallway on a hover board.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

But my life seemed to be about  
THINGS... and keeping track of  
them.

The huge wheels of the hover board roll toward us in 3D. The mouse scrambles in the nick of time to avoid being run over and dashes through a hole in the wall. The camera follows the mouse as it travels though the wall along a tightrope of electrical wires.

KATIE (O.S.)

Ben, do you have it?

BEN (O.S.)

I buried it out back.

KATIE (O.S.)

Ben! Not funny!

The mouse squeezes between studs and plumbing pipes before popping its head through the last stud ...

{REVISION} 5.

KATIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Oh, I found it! ... Five new likes!

... before making his way down to a nest where he greets his mate. They touch noses.

5 INT/EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DAY 5

The camera pulls back out of the dryer vent, to find the blue jay sitting on a branch, surveying the pond.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
I can't believe I never really noticed nature's drama going on all around me.

A loud CRACK rings out.

6 EXT. KATIE'S POND - DUSK 6

A crack appears in the frozen surface of the pond. Ice is fracturing, melting as Spring warmth arrives. Snow melts away from around Katie's house. Snowdrop flowers push up through the melting snow.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
Snowdrop blossoms are the first sign for me that life is waiting in the wings.

In the forest, snow melt forms a pool.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
Melting snow forms temporary pools in the forest. I used to call them swamps but they're actually called vernal, or "Spring" pools..

A thunder clap roars and rain drops speckle the surface of the pool.

7 EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 7

Rain pours down in the woods behind Katie's house.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
Kids, we've got some shopping to do...

{REVISION} 6.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Each year, on the first rainy night  
of Spring, a momentous event  
begins.

The camera descends to the forest floor.

Suddenly, a few wet leaves stir. A dark head pushes up from  
the earth below - a glistening spotted salamander - peculiar  
and beautiful, covered in yellow polka-dot-like markings.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

In hideouts deep underground,  
spotted salamanders have been  
waiting for winter to pass. The  
rain draws them to the surface and  
they begin a great migration.

The salamander marches forward, accompanied by dozens of  
others lurching through the soggy woods.

8

EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DUSK

8

A resonant CHIRPING fills the surroundings. At the edge of  
Katie's yard, a male Spring Peeper frog calls -- his vocal  
sac ballooning in and out as he tries for all he's worth to  
attract a mate.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

The rain also awakens Spring  
Peepers from their winter  
hibernation. The males audition for  
mates with everything they've got.

Other Peepers around the house are holding forth in their  
annual welcome to Spring. From the rain-streaked windows  
behind them, we hear a less-ethereal chorus that mixes with  
the sounds of the frogs - DINGS and SWOOSHES as texts arrive  
and emails depart, along with the zings and zaps of Ben's  
video game.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Ben, let's go!

A frog grows silent, as he watches Katie, Ben and their  
mother rush through the rain to an SUV in the driveway.

KATIE

Mom, for my project, I have to find  
an animal and "observe" it in its  
habitat -- actually outside.

{REVISION} 7.

MOTHER  
Sounds like fun!

KATIE  
Not!

Car doors close and the SUV drives off.

9 EXT. KATIE'S FOREST TO KATIE'S ROAD - DUSK 9

In the woods, meanwhile, the salamanders continue their slow, purposeful march to vernal pool.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
The salamanders have been making this journey since long before we humans arrived on the scene, and we've made it a lot more difficult for them.

Suddenly, the salamanders confront a perilous obstacle, what appear from their POV to be gigantic metal beasts ROARING past. To reach their pool and reproduce, they must risk all by crossing a busy road. The life force drives them on.

10 INT. KATIE'S SUV - NIGHT 10

The camera enters a passing SUV, to find Katie scrolling through her glowing cell phone screen. Her mother is driving.

MOTHER  
Wow! Lots of salamanders tonight!

KATIE  
(Looking up for a moment)  
Hey, maybe I could do my report on salamanders!

MOTHER  
Good idea! I used to find them under logs when I was a kid.

She returns her gaze to her phone.

Back at road level, a female salamander watches others risk all against the traffic. The life force in her compels her forward, narrowly avoiding the wheels of Katie's SUV, before crossing the asphalt to safety.



11 EXT. KATIE'S VERNAL POND - DUSK

11

Reaching the vernal pool, she and other salamanders SLITHER into the water. We follow one into the depths.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.).

Drawn by instinct, the salamanders finally reach their destination -- the same vernal pool where they hatched from eggs. The mating ritual begins. Males deposit packets of sperm that the females pick up to fertilize their eggs.

At the bottom of the pool, dozens of salamanders writhe in an orgy of procreation.

The female salamander climbs onto a submerged twig and begins laying her now-fertilized eggs.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

These vernal pools will be dry in just a few months, but in this short time, many small creatures start their lives here.

A giant water beetle scuttles though the water around the female salamander. Just above the frenzy, fairy shrimp flutter through the water.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Seasonal wetlands are essential to the web of life in the forest.

A shadow moves above the surface. A dark paw plunges toward us through the water, groping for a meal dangerously close to the mother salamander and her newly laid eggs.

The paw then grabs hold of a crayfish and pulls it up. At the surface, a hungry raccoon tears into the crayfish.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

And hungry animals like raccoons take full advantage of the bounty.

12 EXT. KATIE'S DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

12

The raccoon crosses Katie's driveway, just as Katie's family arrives home in their SUV.

{REVISION} 9.

MOTHER  
(opening tailgate)  
Some help with the groceries,  
please.

KATIE  
On it, Major Mom!

Katie and Ben help pull bags of groceries from the car while the raccoon climbs high into a nearby oak tree.

KATIE (CONT'D)  
(carrying groceries to  
house)  
What do salamanders eat?

MOTHER  
Mainly bugs, I think.

They disappear inside the house as the raccoon climbs into a cavity high up in the oak tree. Inside she is greeted by a new litter of CHATTERING kits with big appetites. Far below, we can just make out the sound of the family getting ready for their own meal.

BEN  
Yum! When are WE going to eat?

MOTHER  
(chuckling - pretending to  
give him a hard time)  
As soon as you set the table!

They jostle for her nipples and nurse with abandon. The faint sounds of cooking and video games emanate from the house below.

13 EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT TO DAWN

13

Above the raccoon den, a now-clear, star-filled night sky revolves in time-lapse.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
Life is responding to events on a  
cosmic scale. The Earth's northern  
hemisphere is making its annual  
tilt towards the sun.

As dawn breaks, the rising sun reflects in the windows of Katie's home. Inside, a glowing TV switches on, piercing the golden reflections.

We hear a newscaster:

TV NEWSCASTER (O.S.)

*... another record broken this week for global temperatures. That's according to NASA, the U.S. space agency. This year is already on track to become the warmest ever measured, a record that has been set and broken for three years running ...*

14 EXT. KATIE'S POND - DAWN 14

A pair of wood ducks glides across the mirrored waters of the pond.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Springtime brings wood ducks to the pond to mate.

An ornate male wood duck begins lunging at unpaired males to impress his mate and keep them away from her.

15 EXT. KATIE'S FOREST - DAY 15

The camera glides over the sunlit forest floor.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

All winter long, remarkable creatures have been lying underground - almost completely frozen. Warming temperatures trigger their hearts to beat again... They're wood frogs.

A wood frog crawls out of the ground. Dozens hop en masse through the forest.

16 EXT. KATIE'S VERNAL POND - DAY 16

A wood frog leaps dramatically into the vernal pool by Katie's driveway. In the background, we see Katie's SUV driving by, with Katie's eye's glued to the changing world outside the car.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

They're going where the salamanders go ... to the vernal pool to mate and lay their eggs.

The wood frogs clasp and mate to a deafening chorus of croaks. Egg masses the size of soccer balls fill the pool.

{REVISION} 11.

Nearby, the salamander eggs divide and rotate.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Nearby in the pool, the salamander  
eggs are developing.

17 EXT. KATIE'S FOREST - DAY

17

Skunk cabbage shoots and fiddlehead ferns rise snakelike from  
the soil in time-lapse.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Spring is my favorite time of year.  
The intensifying energy of the sun  
brings everything to life.

Around Katie's house, flower beds erupt in yellows and reds,  
while trees flush out in emerald green. There is color  
everywhere.

18 EXT. WOODS BEHIND KATIE'S HOUSE - DAY

18

A doe makes her way through the forest behind Katie's home.  
In the distance, we hear the sounds of a video chat  
connecting. Then Katie is on-line with some classmates.

JENNA (O.S.)

S'up Katie!?

KATIE (O.S.)

Hey!

SERENA (O.S.)

Hi, so what did everyone choose for  
the ecosystem project?

18A INT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DAY

18A

Looking over Katie's shoulder, we see three of her classmates  
on the kitchen computer screen (SERENA is African American,  
JENNA & EMMA are Anglo, MARIA is Latina). Katie's cat Luna  
watches the conversation.

KATIE

I'm doing salamanders.

EMMA

Aren't they slimy?

MARIA

Where do you even find those?

{REVISION} 12.

KATIE

Well, we were driving in our car...

JENNA

I'm doing skunks! Our dog just got sprayed by one.

They all laugh and react to the news ("Gross," "Ewe," "Yuk!").

18B EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DAY

18B

The doe passes right in front of Katie's house on its way to the garden. Through the window behind it, we see and hear Katie continuing her video chat.

MARIA (O.S.)

I don't know what to pick.

SERENA (O.S.)

Yeah, I can't find *anything*.

The following conversation fades out as we see the deer start munching on rhododendron flowers by the kitchen window.

EMMA (O.S.)

Josh picked coyotes.

MARIA (O.S.)

Do they even live around here?

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Whether we notice them or not, there are countless interactions going on all around us -- like the way new growth attracts plant eaters.

A loud munching sound startles the blue jay, who looks down to see the doe browsing on the rhododendron flowers below. The doe moves on to browse on other garden flowers.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

And plant eaters... (pause) attract predators.

The doe perks her ears, as if hearing something. A coyote is watching from the edge of the woods. Katie's dog, BOOMER, starts BARKING from the window. The coyote turns and disappears. The doe runs off in the opposite direction, while Boomer barks vigorously at the intrigue.

{REVISION} 13.

The mother coyote slinks through the woods and enters a hole in the ground under a fallen tree - her den.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
Coyotes are newcomers to our neighborhood. They moved in after humans killed off their bigger cousins, the wolves.

Inside the den, the mother coyote nuzzles four fluffy pups awake. They wrestle and YAP, and then clamber out of the den.

19

EXT. KATIE'S WOOD DUCK NEST - DAY

19

Loud SQUAWKING pierces the surroundings and we cut to the female wood duck flying overhead and landing in a giant oak right next to Katie's house.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
It's a busy time for the wood duck mother - she has a nest of eggs to keep warm.

She slips into a cavity in the oak, where we discover her clutch of thirteen eggs nestled in a bed of down. She turns the eggs and packs more of her down around them.

We hear Katie's mother in the house below tending to her own brood after school.

KATIE (O.S.)  
Mom, I finished the opening.

MOTHER (O.S.)  
Go for it!

KATIE (O.S.)  
(clears throat)  
*The Salamander's Ecosystem, by  
Katie Martin.*

As she reads, the camera moves around the house, finding more new life. A young cottontail nibbles on grass. A pair of wrens are busy feeding chicks at a birdhouse in the front yard.

KATIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
*What makes our planet so special are the millions of living things on it. All life is connected to its environment... like to the water, soil, sunlight, and other plants and animals.*

{REVISION} 14.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Nice! Keep going.

KATIE (O.S.)

*Each species has its own role to play - and they depend on other species for survival, fitting together like pieces of a giant puzzle.*

As Katie continues, Tiger Swallowtail caterpillars begin MUNCHING on new leaves, some falling prey to blue jay parents, who are working tag team to feed three hungry chicks in their nest by the kitchen window. As Katie continues reading, our attention turns to the drama outside the window.

KATIE (CONT'D)

*One of the pieces of this puzzle is the salamander.*

She pauses as the family cat, Luna, watching the blue jays intently, catches Katie's attention.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Hmm, have you found any outside yet?

Katie looks out the kitchen window to the blue jay family. Entranced in wonder, she gets lost in the moment.

MOTHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Katie?

20

EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

20

As daylight fades, a full moon rises above the suburban landscape. The night sounds of insects BUZZING wells up. Bugs flit here and there around the kitchen window of Katie's house, attracted by the light pouring from it.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Many animals lost their homes and disappeared when we humans moved in, but others adapted to our neighborhoods.

The camera finds tree frogs climbing the side of the house, heading toward the buzzing. One scales the window glass with it's sticky pads and gobbles up a passing bug. Another snatches a moth from the air.

In the background, Ben and Katie's father are watching an episode of Shark Week on TV.

TV NARRATOR (O.S.)

*... awaiting the arrival of the most terrifying predator since T-Rex. And with smell of prey right overhead, it moves in for the kill.*

DIVER 1

*There he is!*

DIVER 2

*Holy Mackerel, he's coming right at us! Whoa!*

NARRATOR

*The great white lunges from underneath, delivering a massive strike with his gaping maw. These sharks can deliver a bite force of up to 4,000 lbs per square inch, making them one of the most formidable killing machines on Earth...*

A tree frog gobbles up a moth in close-up as Katie's mother walk past in the background.

MOTHER

*Katie, the shark show's on!*

21 EXT. KATIE'S WOOD DUCK NEST - NIGHT

21

The Shark Week narration continues for a few beats as we cut to the mother raccoon prowling the treetops, silhouetted by the full moon. She arrives at the tree cavity of the wood duck, high above Katie's house. Far below, Katie can be seen through the window, iPad in her lap.

KATIE (O.S.)

*Just a minute - I'm working on the salamander's food chain...*

We cut inside the tree cavity to see the mother wood duck guarding her eggs.

Suddenly the raccoon's face appears at the opening, startling the mother duck. The raccoon gropes menacingly through the hole at the duck, who steadfastly guards her precious eggs. Fortunately for her, the hole is too small and the raccoon can't quite reach. Instead, the raccoon joins two others in toppling one of the garbage cans at Katie's house.

Above Katie's house, the stars majestically arc through the nighttime sky, before yielding to a golden dawn.



Cracks appear in the wood duck eggs. A tiny beak is chipping at the shell from inside. From the driveway below...

FATHER (O.S.)

Aww, raccoons got into the garbage again!

The mother duck watches attentively as her young peck at their shells from within. Pieces of shell fall away, and ducklings struggle to break free. Soon the mother duck is surrounded by PEEPING ducklings, who jump on her back with enthusiasm.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

One special day that Spring, I discovered that the world outside was so much more wondrous than what I'd imagined.

The mother wood duck climbs out the entrance of cavity and flies to the pond far bellow. She coos to her young, beckoning them to follow.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

The wood ducklings are just a day old, and are about to face one of the biggest tests of their lives - a monumental leap of faith.

One by one the day-old flightless ducklings climb out the entrance hole toward the cooing... then, five stories above the ground, make astonishing, seemingly death-defying leaps.

From a super-slow-motion camera below, we watch the ducklings plunge through the air ... and bounce harmlessly into cushioning leaves on the forest floor.

Katie sits on her bed, playing a game on her iPad. She glances up just in time to see the extraordinary spectacle of wood ducklings raining down outside her window. She drops her iPad in amazement.

KATIE (O.S.)

Ben! Get in here! You have to come see what's happening outside!

{REVISION} 17.

24 EXT. KATIE'S WOOD DUCK TREE - MORNING 24

The ducklings continue to plummet, but now we can see Katie glued to the window watching. The last duckling tumbles down, then waddles to join his siblings and mother at the pond.

25 EXT. KATIE'S FOREST - DAY 25

In a high angle view, we see Katie and Ben walking through the forest.

KATIE

I'm not kidding - it was like raining ducklings outside my window.

Ben holds his hand out and looks up.

BEN

Raining ducklings?  
(TV weatherman's voice)  
There's a 70% chance of ducklings today - oh wait, make that 0%.

KATIE

(sighs)  
Be serious Ben. It's a long way down - I hope they're okay.

They pause to look at a dried up vernal pool.

KATIE (CONT'D)

Hmm ... in Spring this was filled with water. Salamanders actually lay their eggs here. Maybe we can find one.

BEN

Yeah, this ranger dude came to my class and told us that salamanders can actually tell you if the forest is healthy.

KATIE

Really?

BEN

Yah, they breathe through their skin, so they can't survive in places with lots of pollution.

KATIE

Hmm...

{REVISION} 18.

They begin turning over logs. A box turtle watches them from nearby. Ben lifts up a log and reveals a beautiful spotted salamander hiding underneath.

BEN  
Hey there little guy!

KATIE  
Whoa!  
(pause - then with spunk)  
You know, it could be a girl.

They stare at the little creature, who gazes back up at them with it's big black eyes.

KATIE (CONT'D)  
I'm gonna make you a *star*!

Katie raises her smartphone in front of the salamander and frames a close-up. She snaps a photo of the salamander before it slowly ambles off.

26 EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DAY 26

Suddenly a bomb-like raindrop plummets from the sky in slow motion and SMASHES into a blade of grass, flipping a tiny ladybug into the air. More raindrops SMASH into the flowers of the garden, exploding like small water balloons.

26A INT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DAY 26A

The camera moves slowly from a rain streaked window across Katie's desk. There is a magnifying glass, a ruler, pencils and drawing pens. We move past a drawing of a salamander under a log with a few bugs, with some measurements and a hand drawn map of where it was found. The camera comes to rest on Katie's iPad, where she is putting the finishing touches on her report. On the iPad screen we see Katie's photo of the salamander with "SPOTTED SALAMANDER, *Ambystoma maculatum*" written underneath. Her hand scrolls through the report to reveal the final section with the heading "SALAMANDERS AND THE WATER CYCLES" She finishes typing the last sentence of the section and gets up.

KATIE  
I finished the water section of my report!

FATHER (O.S.)  
Great, let's hear it.

26B EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DAY

26B

Katie's cat Luna watches the rain falling from the kitchen window. Behind her we see Katie standing with her iPad.

Katie CLEARS HER THROAT and reads from the iPad.

KATIE

*Like many amphibians, salamanders  
spend a lot of time on land, but  
they can't survive without water.*

We trace the rain's path from roof to gutter to driveway to storm drain as we hear Katie continue reading.

KATIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*The water cycle is a very important  
part of their ecosystem, and of all  
ecosystems.*

FATHER (O.S.)

You got my attention.

KATIE (O.S.)

*Water evaporates from rivers lakes  
and oceans - and even from trees  
and plants. It forms into clouds  
that release rain, which falls back  
to the ground...*

A coyote pup breaks the surface of the vernal pool with her tongue, while a salamander swims by. The ladybug imbibes a leftover rain drop. The blue jay takes a birdbath. The field mouse drinks from a leaky pipe under the kitchen sink. Katie continues:

KATIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*...and fills the temporary pools  
where the salamanders lay their  
eggs and grow. No one can survive  
without clean water. And lots of  
salamanders means their habitat is  
healthy ... Isn't that cool?*

FATHER (O.S.)

Sure is! I'll drink to that!

Katie's hand turns on a faucet and fills a water glass.

{REVISION} 20.

27 EXT. - SEVERAL WEEKS LATER - KATIE'S BACKYARD - DAY 27

A red-bellied woodpecker watches Katie and Ben board the school bus.

KATIE

I get my science grade today. This year went too fast!

BEN

I wouldn't go that far, but yeah, summer is good.

In a secluded spot behind the garage, the doe settles down in tall grass and gives birth to a glistening fawn.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

I think of summer as the season when forest life grows up. To escape danger, fawns need to learn how to run alongside their mothers within minutes of birth.

The spindly fawn takes its first awkward steps, revealing a second fawn behind it. The coyote pups watch curiously from nearby, as one of fawns begins suckling.

28 EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DAY 28

A tiger swallowtail caterpillar, fattened on Spring leaves, inches up the side of the house deck and attaches to the railing.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

If you're a tiger swallowtail caterpillar, summer is a time of *transformation*.

In time-lapse, the caterpillar encases itself in a chrysalis... and emerges a gorgeous yellow-and-black butterfly. On the deck behind it, Katie's family and friend appear. As the tiger swallowtail unfolds its wings, Katie and her friend Maria brush Boomer. Behind them Katie's mom is reading while her father prepares the grill.

KATIE'S FATHER

You guys ready for some barbecue?

MARIA

Definitely!

KATIE (O.S.)

Wanna throw the ball for Boomer?

MARIA

Sure!

As Katie and Maria get up they notice the butterfly drying its wings on the deck railing.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Wow, that's beautiful!

Katie pulls out her smartphone and snaps a photo of the butterfly before it flies off. It sails amongst the flowers beating its gorgeous wings, until coming to rest to gorge on the nectar of a butterfly bush. The garden is buzzing with other pollinators.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Looking back, I realize that I was transforming too, and becoming more aware of how the natural world works. Not only do animals need *plants* for food, but many plants need animals.

A bumble bee flies down to flowering clover on the lawn and probes for nectar.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Much of life on Earth - including humans - could not exist without these partnerships...

The sound of a LAWN MOWER arises. The camera finds a bee HOVERING over a patch of flowering clover.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

...like the insects that pollinate our food.

Suddenly the power mower ROARS into frame like a mechanical giant, devouring the clover flowers, sending the bee racing away.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

And we're affecting our environment in ways we don't even think about.

A hummingbird HOVERS at the kitchen window, perhaps catching its own reflection, or gazing at the mother too busy washing dishes to glimpse the visitor.

In the oak tree at the edge of Katie's yard, the mother raccoon emerges from her den, followed by her curious kits.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
Summer is a time to get outside  
your den and explore.

To the beat of a lively pop tune, we witness a gymnastic test, as the kits shimmy down the trunk, legs stretched as wide as their small bodies will allow.

When the kits reach the ground, they follow their mother, who leads them on their first exploration of the neighborhood.

Nearby, the coyote pups are also learning about the world around them. They wrestle and run with abandon, leaping at a passing swallowtail butterfly as they go.

We see our other animal characters learning about the world around them. The blue jay watches as Katie and Ben shoot hoops on the driveway with Katie's friend Maria and Ben's friend Lance, who is Asian.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
All of us love playtime. It's how  
we learn to navigate the world.

The raccoons are bounding through the woods. Twitching their noses at the new scents, they are a study in wild curiosity, which turns comedic as they encounter a box turtle.

They leap back as the turtle's head SNAPS into the shell, then tiptoe close SNIFF around the creature turned to rock.

The raccoon family crosses a suburban street near Katie's house, and as they exit the frame, trees in the background transform from Summer green to the vibrant colors of Fall.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
While the young creatures of the  
forest are learning about their new  
home, the days are getting shorter,  
and once again, change is in the  
air.

Through the window of her house, we see Katie seated at her computer.

{REVISION} 23.

Her gaze shifts to the view out the window - the changing colors of autumn reflecting around her face. A golden leaf floats gracefully down in front of the window.

30A EXT. KATIE'S BACKYARD - DAY

30A

The golden leaf comes to rest on Katie's deck.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Today, when I look at nature, I  
see countless connections.

Katie's hand enters the frame with her smartphone and snaps a photo of it with her iNaturalist app. The app presents her with several possibilities. She selects the Red Oak, speaking the name to herself.

KATIE

Northern Red Oak.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Take oak trees and blue jays...

Nearby, a blue jay watches as an acorn falls from the oak, plummeting to the ground like a torpedo. The jay picks it up the acorn and flies off to a secret spot in the woods behind Katie's house.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

These birds love to eat acorns, but  
they also love to stash them away  
for later.

The blue jay carefully buries the acorn in the ground and flies off.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

...and some of the hidden acorns  
will be forgotten, ensuring there  
will be plenty of new oak trees.

31 EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DUSK

31

As daylight fades, the deer family grazes by the house. The camera pans through the woods to reveal that the fawn is being watched by the mother coyote and her nearly grown pups.



OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Out here, deer populations are increasing, and that's an opportunity for the young coyotes, who are learning to scavenge and hunt.

In nature, there are neither villains nor victims, just predators and prey.

For a tense moment, the predators focus on the unsuspecting prey. Suddenly, a frenzied chase erupts across backyards and driveways. The fawn escapes, but an old doe is brought down amidst a chorus of HOWLS.

In an emotional interlude, the doe carcass decomposes in time-lapse, returning to the soil, and the trees of the forest transform into leafless skeletons.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

The remains of one, can nourish many. That is the cycle of life.

32 EXT. KATIE'S POND - AFTERNOON

32

We hear the distant sound of DUCK CALLS. The camera glides over the pond, now nearly devoid of Autumn color. Below, a flock of ducks takes off from the pond, beginning their long journey south.

In slow-motion, the wood ducks from Katie's yard, including now-grown youngsters, take off from the pond and disappear southward with their kind.

In time-lapse, ice envelopes the surface of the pond.

33 KATIE'S BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

33

The woods around the house dissolve from Autumn landscape to a Winter snowstorm.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

With less direct sunlight, the Earth's northern hemisphere enters Winter, the most unforgiving season.

Birds sit on barren trees in the driving snow. On the back porch of Katie's house, chickadees, titmice and juncos desperately compete for the last remaining seeds at the bird feeder. Through the snow covered dining room window, we see Katie's family seated at the dinner table.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

We sometimes forget how good we have it.

KATIE

Mom, can I have more lasagna?

MOTHER

Sure!

The camera pulls back to reveal a desperate struggle for seed at the feeder.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Outside, there's no guarantee of a meal.

The blue jay moves in and displaces the smaller birds. The jay grabs the last peanut and flies off. From the house, we hear a newscaster delivering the weather report.

TV WEATHERPERSON (O.S.)

(overheard from house)

*... well Don, this is going to be one blockbuster storm and the reason why is that we have two areas of low pressure here which will combine into one very big and intense nor'ester as it makes it's way up the eastern seaboard.*

*(barely audible) Gale force winds are expected and the tri-state area could see over 14 inches of snow on top of what we've already received*

*...*

The winter storm is thrashing the neighborhood. By nightfall, it's a blizzard.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

Now and then, we're reminded that the forces of nature are in charge, not us.

{REVISION} 26.

A loud CRACK, and a tree CRASHES onto a power line. The lights in Katie's house go off. From inside, we hear the sounds of the family getting into action.

BEN (O.S.)  
Arrghhh! Power's out!

FATHER (O.S.)  
I'll check the breaker - Ben, can you get the flashlight?

In time-lapse, moonlight bathes Katie's house in solitude, until the rising sun reveals a wonderland blanketed in snow.

36 INT/EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE & BACKYARD - MORNING

36

Katie's face appears at the window. She gazes out at the fresh snow.

Bundled up, she opens the front door. Sunlight comes streaming in. She trudges out across the untouched snow-covered yard.

She notices tracks in the snow and follows them into the woods. The mouse, raccoon, and blue jay notice her as she passes by.

As she enters a small clearing, she finds herself face to face with the deer family. Their necks straighten and ears pop up. The two species stare at each other, frozen.

We see Katie's face in close up. Something magical is happening. She glances about, this time actually seeing... A mighty oak tree towers above her. The blue jay squawks overhead. A cluster of snow drops are pushing up through the snow ... Her eyes sparkle with discovery. The closing score wells up ...

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
The Earth's yearly cycle is complete, and will now begin again...

37 EXT. FOREST TO CAR - DAY

37

The snow vanishes and a time-lapse montage fills the screen, of life beginning anew.

Spring plants push up near the weathered bones of the old doe, the acorn buried by the blue jay takes root, the first Spring rain arrives, and spotted salamanders march through the woods on their journey to the vernal pool.

{REVISION} 27.

38 INT. KATIE'S SUV - NIGHT 38

Katie leans forward in her seat.

KATIE  
Salamanders! Stop the car!

39 EXT. ROAD IN FOREST - NIGHT 39

Katie's car pulls over and Katie climbs out and directs her family.

KATIE  
Mom, Dad, stop the traffic! We have to help them get across!

FATHER  
Stop! Stop! Saving some salamanders.

Together, mother and father stop traffic. Katie and Ben safely transport the salamanders across the road so they can reach the vernal pool and create their next generation.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
I can still remember how good I felt, even for making that small difference. And that's when I knew my life had changed.

Katie releases a salamander on the forest floor.

KATIE  
There you go girl!

She takes a photo of the rescued salamander with her iphone and posts it on Instagram. The screen fills with other posts by Katie of the wilderness in her back yard.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)  
I'm studying biology in college now. I'm excited about becoming a scientist and trying to unravel ecological mysteries.

The screen fills with dozens of images of nature posted on social media by other kids and people in a variety of settings, city, town and woods.

{REVISION} 28.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

I hope that all of us get a chance  
to discover nature in our own  
places, even in cities - in parks,  
gardens and in backyards big and  
small. Those special places are  
ours to explore, understand ... and  
protect.

40

INT/EXT. KATIE'S HOUSE - DAY

40

We cut to the bare feet of young Katie hurrying down the  
hallway to the front door.

OLDER KATIE (V.O.)

All we have to do... is step  
outside.

As she opens the door, the image turns to slow motion. We  
watch from behind as she runs with graceful abandon through  
the open door, toward the wild world awaiting her.

FADE TO WHITE.

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